

D.O.A.



A scheduled interview with Joey Keithley of D.O.A. in Seattle, Washington, doesn't go off exactly as planned. There's been an irritating back-up at the Canadian border and although it's not his fault in the least, Keithley calls my answering machine at home to apologize profusely for the delay.

The problem is that I'm already at the club, waiting. I'm fortunate to enjoy the company of the band's soundman, Bob, who entertains me with delightful travel stories and the kind of dry, self-deprecating humor that I most enjoy. At least four hours later, the touring van finally pulls up, and a harried Keithley once again offers his most sincere apologies for the inconvenience.

All this sweetness and decency—it just must be a Canadian thing. Whatever it is, it's only caused my respect-o-meter to move up a notch for the veteran hardcore singer who I've been listening to for the better part of the last 15 years or so.

Festival of the Atheists presents D.O.A. in a yet another new band configuration, with drummer Brien O'Brien and bassist Kuba. But with Keithley at the helm, the seriously political and comedically eccentric themes for which D.O.A. has become known are undiluted: economic monopolization takes a beating in "Death to the Multinationals," while "Give 'Em The Lumber" wittily celebrates Canada's favorite pastime, ice hockey. By Silja J.A. Talvi

MRR: What political or environmental issues have been of recent concern to you—on a local, national or international level? I noticed that part of the proceeds from Festival of Atheists, for instance, were going toward a needle ex-

change program in Vancouver...

JK: Yes, DEYAS (Downtown Eastside Youth Activities Society). If you go into the middle of Vancouver—centered around the downtown east side—it's easily got one of the highest rates of HIV infection in the world. And it's just getting worse. I ran into a vendor the other day in that area, and she said "Well, I don't think they should be giving needles out to these people. It just encourages them. We should just give them dirty ones and kill them all off." That's just stupid.

I think the thing about drugs is that what we do in Western society, especially in Canada and the States, is criminalize these people rather than helping them. If someone's got an addiction, we should try and help them, rather than create more jails, more cops.

MRR: On the musical front, you've started putting out a number of releases on your own label, Sudden Death, which I seem to recall existed for awhile in the late 70s and early 80s.

JK: We put out the first three singles in '78, '79 on Sudden Death Records. We just sort of put them out and didn't develop any distribution or anything. We thought we'd just make a thousand singles or something like that and see who wanted to buy them, and it was a great ticket—that's what got DOA traveling all around North America and eventually Europe. In the 80s we put out four singles which we called instant benefit "crisis singles," one for the Vancouver 5 (Burn It Down/Fuck You), General Strike—which was the General Strike situation (it came close to it) in 1983, and we did another

EP called EXPO hurts everyone, about EXPO 1986, and one other one.

But with the label, I found that I got too busy touring around to be able to keep it up. I've been thinking about doing this for a couple of years now, and it occurred to me after DOA went through this big tumultuous shake-up after we came back from Europe in October 1996. We

stopped working with our manager, and the bass player returned from punk rock after playing in DOA for 14 years, and we got out of our record deal, which stank. So it was basically just me and Brien, the drummer. We just kind of said "What do we do now?" So we started working on a few songs. One good pal of mine at Profile, he fronted us the studio time—we didn't have two panes to rub together basically. We went from there, making tapes, and I started sending the tapes around, talking to different people. One guy that I got good advice from was Fat Mike at Fat Wreck Chords. He said, "Joe, you're stupid, you should do your own label!" (laughter)

MRR: Were those his exact words?

JK: Pretty well. I don't know if he called me stupid, but more or less.

MRR: Can you explain why it's particularly significant for you to have always resisted major labels and to now provide an independent label for these other bands, including old Sham 69 stuff, Toxic Reasons, and so forth? Why the DIY ethic is so important to you?

JK: I think it's important to avoid majors. We've had mixed dealings before with Profile Records in New York, which was not a major, but a big independent label. They turned out to be slimy. We've been burned a few times by Restless in Los Angeles. They weren't as big as assholes as Profile people. Then this last one got licensed out to this company called Essential Noise, which was distributed by Carolina in the States, and by Virgin in Canada. It didn't work out; it was a complete

waste of time. Virgin had absolutely no idea what they were doing with their label. Jello said to begin with, "Well, I wouldn't do that, Joe..." (imitating warbling voice) But we went and did it. It was one of our many stupid mistakes. We've had about five or six rally gross errors that we've made over 20 years.

MRR: That's not so bad, only five or six errors.

JK: Yeah, that's true. We've made lots of small ones, but a few really large and grotesque ones. But what I like about doing this now is that I'm in a position to put out records when I want, what I like, and anytime. It's the type of thing about—I can speak to this and some people might call me a hypocrite because I haven't followed it completely throughout my entire life—but if you can be in control of your life and do things for yourself—not standing along as an island, but be more in control of your life than having people pull the strings on you, then this is a good way for you to do it.

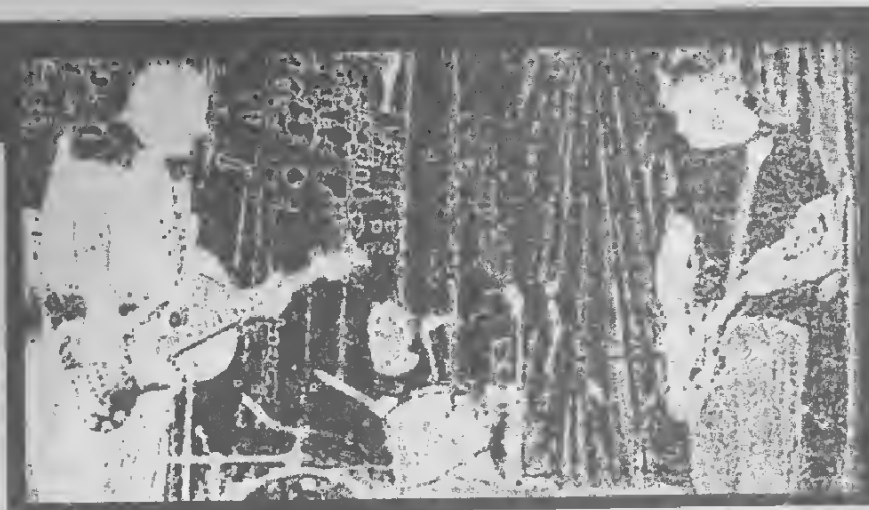
I've got a bunch of funny ideas. I've got one—we did this sort of weird, esoteric jazz version of some Elvis Presley songs with this 27-piece jazz orchestra. So we recorded that at the CBC so I'm thinking of putting that out as an EP. I'd have a hard time talking anyone else into putting that out, right, because it's so bizarre.

MRR: I'd love to hear that.

JK: Yeah, it was pretty neat! It was from this thing called the Elvis Cantata wherein there's three singers—the young Elvis, the medium Elvis, and the old Elvis. I was the medium Elvis. They actually flew us out to Ottawa to perform this at the National Arts Center in Ottawa. But it got canceled because of an ice storm. But that's another story. Some of the songs sound like Elvis Presley, and others are completely unrecognizable. Hopefully that will come out in the Fall, but this gives me a chance to do anything I want, which is great.

MRR: So tell me about your foray into the CD-ROM world with this new album. Are you really fond of multimedia and Net technology yourself?

JK: I'm a bit of a late-comer into it. I'm definitely interested in it, though. One of the guys at Profile Studios really wanted



to work on it...As we were finishing this album, Festival of Atheists, he said "how about letting me turn it into a CD-ROM?" We had tons and tons of footage and we searched around for an idea and we didn't really have a concrete one and then we came up with this thing of bringing my video camera into this place called the Forte Prenestino, which is the scene as you enter [the CD-ROM]. It's this 18th century fort near the center of Rome that was built for the defense of Rome, and the Germans used it as their headquarters during the Second World War. It's huge. They have this one open-air concert area where they can put 5,000 people. And that only takes up about only an eighth of the physical area. It's massive—there's tunnels going underground, and it's all dug in, as a fort. There are four big open courtyards, right? It's funny because you're just walking through a normal Italian neighborhood, and all of a sudden there's this anarchist squat. The people there are pretty good and we developed a pretty good friendship with them. So, I just used that as the ticket in, and I thought it made sense because of the politics—it's a really cool place. I think it's the best place to play in Europe, myself. That's why I was eager to put it in there.

Mark Cohen, who did the CD-ROM, he showed me a few things and we started talking about it and coming up with some ideas, and this whole idea about entering these different temples of irreverence, the temple of doom and so on, we thought these are the people's ... See, the whole idea behind the Festival of Atheists, if we could actually pull it off, would be based on the Trips Festival, which all these things like Lillith and Lollapalooza are all copied from. But instead of going to all these different booths and getting tattoos or your hair dyed or food or whatever, you'd invite philosophical opponents to debate these things. If you could pull it off, you would invite all these people on the religious right to try and

come and show these atheists that they're wrong or fucked-up. But it could get fairly violent.

MRR: I would expect as much. (laughter)

JK: At first I thought about a 'convention of atheists,' and then I thought, no, that sounds to dry, but a 'festival of atheists,'

that sounds like more fun. We may be able to pull it off at some point, maybe even at a few shows. But at least we can follow the theme on the CD-ROM and have some fun with it, right?

MRR: One of the things that I've always found interesting about your approach to your native country is how you simultaneously celebrate and criticize Canadian culture and society.

JK: Yeah, I'm not a chest-beating nationalist.

MRR: And nor are you just against everything Canada is. In other words, you do really appreciate a lot of the aspects of the culture. Tell me more about why you've chosen to stay in Canada all these years—in the same region, no less?

JK: I've thought about moving away before, to New York. A lot of people always perceived us as being from California. Except the people from California, I suppose. "They sure don't sound like they're from here!" The things I like about Canada—there's a lot less guns, so there's a lot less violence. There's socialized medicine and although that's being eroded. People are saying "We should bring in an American style healthcare system. Isn't it great?" The answer is really obvious: No, it's not. There's also a kind of social compassion that's been part of the Canadian fabric, where America's been a lot more like "You gotta stand on your own, because otherwise, you're not strong." Whereas, I've always thought that a lot of people are not in a position to stand on their own. Opportunity is a lot more limited than they would have you believe. There's a lot of people that need help, so why not help them. I think that's part of the Canadian way. Although I think the Conservatives under Brian Mulroney and Jean Chretien have wanted to erode that. It's very sad, because a lot of the very Canadian Canadianism is eroding and be-

coming more Americanized. I feel, unfortunately, in the last five or ten years, Vancouver has stopped being more like an overgrown hicktown, and it's actually become more like a city and has taken on some American aspects to it.

People shouldn't get me wrong, because there's a lot of parts of the States that I like and it's not that I dislike the States or Americans. But there are some real essential differences, and I think that in Canada, I prefer those things.

The more comic end of it is always at the hockey end—hocked and beer and that whole angle of DOA. I think that's a real essential part of what we are. We have our own hockey squad, the DOA Murder Squad and when we play games we usually win. We usually play media teams—we played SNFU and Bad Religion. And we whupped them pretty good!

MRR: I believe you did.

JK: Afterwards, we like nothing better than to go to the bar and have a bunch of beers and chortle about it all. Of course, none of us ever made it to the NHL. I still have my dreams of being the NHL's oldest rookie, but I think that's faded. I love the game. It's a fun thing about being a Canadian.

MRR: Bob (the soundman) was saying something about you actually being half-Finnish. Is that true?

JK: Yeah! My mother was Finnish. She comes from a little town up the coast, close to the Arctic Circle.

MRR: Have you been there?

JK: No, I've been to Norway, Denmark, Sweden.

MRR: But you haven't played in Helsinki?

JK: No. That really stinks. Hopefully, if I can get Sudden Death going, we could get up there, because I know people up there. My mom's family moved over when she was four.

MRR: You mentioned, in passing, that you have a one-year-old son?

JK: Yes, I've got three kids.

MRR: So tell me how family life has changed you, and what kind of life lessons you've learned from the punk rock scene that you're then able to pass on to your kids? How are you, perhaps, raising your family differently than you were raised?

JK: My father's a complete reactionary, so [instead of what he wanted] he got me



and my older brother who's an organizer for the Canadian Auto Workers. He wanted us both to be lawyers or businessmen or something. The way I try and raise my kids is to get them to think for themselves. Obviously, it doesn't work out completely that way. Kids are kids and parents are parents, and we have our fights "You can't do that, yes I can" kind of thing. One thing, my parents discouraged me from playing music. My old man built a power switch so that when my first band would practice in my bedroom, when he got a headache, he could turn us off. (laughter)

One thing that's changed is that I don't travel as much as I used to. In '85, for instance, I think we traveled like 9 months straight, with one week off. I changed that and I try to pick and choose what I'm doing. I've got them really interested in music, I got them a piano, and I bring them out to some shows.

MRR: Do you? So what are their ages?

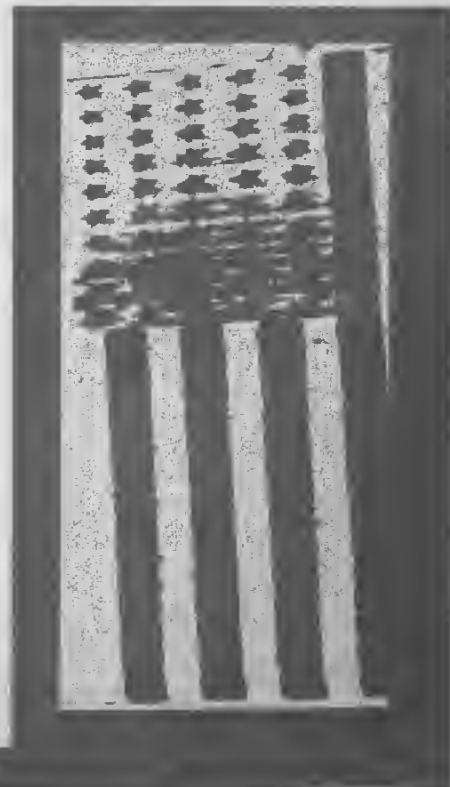
JK: Ten, eight and one. My daughter, when I practice my acoustic stuff, she sits there out in the shed with me, and then she'll listen and be getting into it. As soon as the song finishes, she grabs two drumsticks and beats on a floor tom and she says "Boo, boo, you really stink!" after every single song. So, I figure if I can play in front of her, I can play in front of anyone. She's my worst critic. And that's why she subjects me to the Spice Girls every day.

MRR: You've been involved in the hardcore scene as a musician and as an agitator for two decades—which is longer than most people have stayed involved. Your heart is clearly with the punk scene, even though it's changed considerably. What keeps you so involved and connected to it, and where do you derive your sense of

personal and political power from?

JK: I think the main thing is having a belief in yourself. That's a really hard thing to get a lot of times, because you end up being really beaten down through school or your parents or your circumstances. When I was a kid at school I was pretty reserved and quiet. I was pretty squished down by my father. I guess I was a late bloomer, because I was considered to be the introvert of the family.

I think just having the inner belief in ones own self—that you can do it. This whole trip about atheism and all that is that I got nothing against people's spirituality. It's just the so-called cheerleaders of God, like all the televangelists and stuff like that. They don't let people freely express themselves or feel free; you have to really follow their doctrine. You look at, say, the Catholic Church, and they have a really hard time getting with it. They don't know what's going on with their flock, shall we say. I do this because I have fun at it. One of the things that has kept me going is that when you get there and play for people, if it's going well (and it doesn't go well every night, but the majority of nights it does), that lifts your spirit, and it makes you free. That's the same thing I got out of it when I was a kid. That really hasn't changed, although the world around me and my age and circumstances have, a lot.





So, I was going to see the Dead Kennedys at the Paramount Theater in Staten Island. The bill included Flipper, SSDeControl, and DOA. I already had "Fresh Fruit" and Flipper's "Generic" (no relations), so I went out and got a DOA record and an SSDeControl record. I did not care for SSDeControl at all. As I played the DOA I discovered they were horribly slow, then I realized the "45" in "War on 45" meant the record's speed! DOH! Flipper did not end up playing, but Kraut did, the show was fucking great! That's when I first was introduced to DOA, that was about fifteen years ago and I'm still initially, playing that damned record at the wrong speed! DOH!!

DOA is a punk rock institution, with Joey "Shithead" Kiethley as the mad man behind the driving force. Something is to be said about a man who keeps integrity and passion burning for over twenty years in the same band. Similar to Greg Ginn's Black Flag, Shithead has had many players pass through the doors of the mighty DOA. The history of members is so large that a family tree sketch is included in the CD booklet of "DOA The Lost Tapes". DOA started in the familiar year of 1978, however, they come from Vancouver, Canada, worlds away from the New York and British punk scenes. The original line up was Randy Rampage (bass and vocals), Chuck Biscuits (drums) and of course, Joey Shithead (vocals and guitars). Early DOA alumni included Harry Homo (vocals), Randy Romance (guitar), and Brad Kunt (guitar). Kunt went on to play with the Avengers.

DOA started out very young and ambitious. Chuck Biscuits was only fifteen

years old. Randy Rampage switched to bass from drums just for DOA, the transition was easy and natural. DOA quickly drew a large following and became Canada's finest, earning themselves a reputation for a highly energetic and exciting band. Shithead has the ability to compel an audience and his antics of pissing, spewing and fighting with the audience, became legendary. DOA began playing all over Canada, and toured North America very early on. They also played in Chicago for the "Rock Against Racism" that started in England. This gig brought a larger audience for DOA. DOA music is very exciting, they are intelligent and bring their points across with a healthy sense of humor, as opposed to beating you over the head. They are politically and socially aware, but keeps things at a tounge and cheek attitude, while still maintaining their validity.

In 1978 DOA released their first recordings, "Disco Sucks" 7" EP. This was released on their own label, Sudden Death Records. "Disco Sucks" found its way topping the Alternative Charts, coming in ahead some great contemporaries like, the Clash, Angelic Upstarts, and X-Ray Spex. In 1978 DOA had seen a lot their first EP did well and they already went through several line up changes. They played with all the best Canadian bands and many of the best American bands. Before the year was out they released "The Prisoner" single on Quintessence Records. "The Prisoner" to me began the signature DOA sound, later Jello would include it on his "Let Them Eat Jellybeans" compilation. "It took us a long time to get to the bottom... and we ain't stopping there", is an old DOA saying. It is hard enough for any band to tour and release records without major label support, but a punk band makes it ten times more difficult, especially one as honest as DOA. Constant touring and the lack of



support took its toll on the band. Members would come and go, but this did not slow down Shithead, Biscuits managed to stay with the band until 1982. Meanwhile the band released some more singles and put out their first full-length "Something Better



Records". After many labels their latest release is own their label as their first is, they come full circle. DOA and Shithead has done some side projects with Jello, and many ex-members went on to other active bands. DOA is still around today keeping true to form, you can contact them at: Sudden Death Records, 4250 Spruce St., Burnaby B.C., Canada 45g-4W2. I can't say that I like everything they ever done, some stuff is on the heavy side, all in all, their definitely worth check out. "We don't care, What you say, Fuck You".

Discography:

- "Disco Sucks" 7" EP (Sudden Death, 1978)
- "The Prisoner" 7" EP (Quinntessence, 1978)
- "I Hate U" / "Kill, Kill, This Pop" (Pinned, 1979)
- "World War 3" / "Watcha Gonna Do?" (Sudden Death, 1979)
- "Something Better Change" (Friends, 1980)
- "Triumphs of the Ignoroids" 12" EP (live) (Friends, 1980)
- "Hardcore '81" (Friends, 1981)
- "Positevely DOA-No God, No Country, No Lies" 7" EP (Alternative Tentacles, 1981)
- "War on 45" (Alternative Tentacles / Faulty Products, 1982)
- "Right to be Wild" 7" EP (C.D. Presents, 1983)
- "General Strike" / "That's Life" (Sudden Death, 1983)
- "Bloodied But Unbowed" (Alternative Tentacles, 1983)
- "Don't Turn Yer Back, On Desperate Times" 12" EP (Alternative Tentacles, 1985)
- "Let's wreck the Party" (Alternative Tentacles, 1985)

DOA is also included on many fine compilations and have records out with Jello Biafra.

Change" on Friends Records in 1980. In 1981 they released their second full-length called "Hardcore '81". In doing so they coined the phrase "Hardcore". This term was meant to describe the newer sound of punk rock. I'd like to mention here, that hardcore back then and to me still, is bands like DOA, Circle Jerks, Adolescents, Exploited, etc., etc., not this hybrid metal from New York!!

By this time DOA has become well known in punkdom. They honed their skills and developed a sound that was very DOA. They began to incorporate Reggae into, their sound, which is very prevalent on their "War on 45" record released in 1982. On the back cover of this record DOA gives us the mathematical equation Talk minus Actions equals Zeroll. In September of 1983 Alternate Tentacles released "Bloodied but Unbowed" (The Damage to Date 1978-1984). It is these two records "War on 45" and "Bloodied but Unbowed" that I find to be essential DOA Records. Do yourself a favor and make sure you have these records in your collection.

It has been over twenty years since DOA started and the story does not end here. Poetically, DOA has just released a new record, "Festival of Atheists" on their own label "Sudden Death

